



Commissioner
James M. Kirby

South Carolina Commission for the Blind

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June 6, 2011

Marlene Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: *Connect America Fund, WC Docket No. 10-90, A National Broadband Plan for Our Future, GN Docket No. 09-51, High-Cost Universal Service Support, WC Docket No. 05-337*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB) is a state agency created to provide rehabilitation services, adjustment to blindness training, prevention of blindness, independent living services and various other services to blind and severely visually impaired citizens of South Carolina. We strive to provide social and economic independence for the blind.

SCCB's services are made available with state and federal funding. There is no charge to consumers for services. We know every dollar we save helps us to operate an efficient state government. Consequently, our goal is to operate with as minimal costs as possible while still reaching every person we can who is afflicted with blindness. One way we have found to reduce our operating costs is to use free conferencing services which are not free but less expensive than other carriers.

Twice a month, the SCCB uses FreeConferenceCall.com to have conference calls with our blind vendors whom we help through the Business Enterprise program (BEP). The BEP trains, licenses and places vendors in snack bars, cafeterias, and rest stops throughout the state. Becoming a Blind Licensed Vendor allows a person who is blind or visually impaired to become the owner of their very own vending location. They operate the facility as their own business and receive income from the net profits. One of our proudest moments is when we can place a blind and/ or visually impaired individual where they want to work!

The program was established in 1936 under the authorizing legislation of the Randolph-Sheppard Act. This federal regulation provides qualified blind individuals the opportunity to operate businesses on Federal property by granting them priority on such property. Shortly, thereafter, all states established a similar law that included state, county and municipal property.

The Business Enterprise Program works with SCCB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and consumers in identifying potential consumers to complete training as Blind Licensed Vendors.

When we speak to the Blind Licensed Vendors twice a month use free conferencing, we are helping them manage their own small business by providing training and guidance, as well as checking on the status of inventory and machine equipment. Understandably, it would be difficult for these blind vendors if they had to travel to receive this help. Free conferencing enables us to cost effectively communicate with blind people who seek independence and employment.

As you move forward in your rulemaking process on this issue, I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

Otis Stevenson

Interim Director, Business Enterprise Program
South Carolina Commission for the Blind

cc: Chairman Julius Genachowski
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker